

Will's our Cleric by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: A good boy™, Chester the dog - Freeform, Eleven (Stranger Things) is a Byers, F/M, Gen, I love dogs and would die for the Byers dog, Multi, The pairings are kinda click bait kinda not, Will has Powers, Will-centric, good platonic love and El/Mike/Will love each other especially, they all love each other

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Max & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

Will is changed by his time in the Upside Down. He's become the mage he imagined as a kid; the powerful "Will the Wise" from his drawings. Only he doesn't feel wise, or powerful. He's mostly just scared.

Or, Will has healing powers AU.

1. A good boy™

The first time it happened, he convinced himself that it was just a dream. He had been looking for Chester. It was strange, he hadn't seen his dog in weeks but he had barely even noticed. The past few months Will had felt as if his head were stuffed with cotton wool, as if he were underwater and everything around him- noise, light, sound- was all distorted. But he woke up one particular morning with a strange sense of clarity and a strong sense of guilt. He had been so caught up in his own mind, so absorbed with the upside down and the ways it had taken over his entire life, that he had forgotten his best friend. So he began searching in the early hours of the morning in his backyard and calling from the front porch as loud as he dared.

He was no longer allowed to venture into the town or woods alone and had no inclination to do so anyway. Even the sight of their battered shed, unassuming and empty, bathed in morning sunlight, sent shivers down his spine. He didn't just get scared in the dark anymore. He was always scared. But by the corner of the shed, a golden, fluffy shape caught his eye. His breath caught. Chester! He stumbled out across the grass and ran, shouting his dog's name. There was no response, no wag of a tail or answering bark. Will slowed his pace, trying to ignore his increasing feeling of unease.

"Chester?" He said, walking closer. His dog lay motionless on his side in the grass

"Hey, boy, it's me, hey!" Nothing. He crouched down next to him, listening intently for breathing and searching for any tell-tale signs of life, the constant rise and fall of his dog's chest. He reached forwards with a trembling hand and tangled his fingers into his boy's fur.

"B-buddy?" Chester's fur was strangely matted, thicker and longer than Will was used to. Before the Upside Down, Will used to devote *hours* to brushing him and taming his mane until his coat shone and he had always found combing out the knots weirdly soothing. Now, it was damp and tangled. Not just damp. It was also sticky. He could feel that his dog's chest was covered in something wet and warm. Will drew his hand back. Blood. Horrified, he stared at his stained fingers, guilt and grief washing over him simultaneously.

"No." He whispered, screwing his eyes shut against the light and scene before him. This wasn't happening. "No, No, No, No!"

He needed his Mom or Jonathon or his friends. He needed someone to tell him this wasn't real and that Chester was alive, panting and drooling and constantly in the way, with people tripping over him. He needed to wake up. Why couldn't he wake up?

"Chester!" His voice broke and his lower lip trembled. "C-Chester, hey, come on, please!"

His dog remained silent and unmoving. Will leaned over, placed both hands on either side of his dog's face and stared into brown, glassy eyes. Please, he thought desperately. He can't be dead, not because of him or the Upside Down or any of the bad things in this place. Please, let his dog be alive. He bowed his head, holding his dog's head in his palms so that they were nose to snout. He closed his eyes, shuddered and tried not to cry. The wind dropped. Will was eerily reminded of the upside down and its relentless silence. The scariest thing about being trapped there had been its emptiness. No wind, no light, no sun. No day or night. Just quiet, his own jagged breathing and the smell of death, like rotting. He could still smell that rot everywhere he went. Hawkins stank of it. He smelt it now and felt hopeless. Will Byers, weak. Useless. Powerless against his fears. His fingers clenched and he gritted his teeth.

'No,' he thought fiercely. 'I am not in the Upside Down anymore. We are alive and home. My dog is alive. I am alive. Please.' He thought of El and her strength. Mike and Lucas and Dustin and all of their bravery. He could be brave too. He felt a strange buzzing in his head and static flooded his body.

All he could think was that didn't want to be owned anymore. He wanted to be in control. The buzzing intensified; his hands grew warmer. And then, something wet swiped across his cheek and he jerked back instinctively, falling into the grass.

"What the-?" He spluttered, propping himself up onto his elbows and wiping his face with the back of his hand. The something wet nudged him again and he stared. His dog stood before him, right as rain, tail wagging excitedly. Chester pawed the ground and circled Will,

sniffing at his neck and hair curiously. Will blinked.

“Chester!” He scrambled to his feet and laughed as his dog bounded around his legs, weaving through them and almost knocking him flat again. It was just a dream. Just a weird, waking-nightmare dream. His dog was very much alive, Chester was fine and it was all in his head. He scanned his dog for signs of harm but there was nothing. No blood. No wounds. Just his dog, safely home. He laughed again, shakily, out of relief.

“Come on boy! Lets go inside and I'll get you some food, okay?”

He turned back to the house, followed by a fluffy, barking ball of energy. As he reached to open the door, he glanced down at his hand on the door knob. Streaks of blood covered his palm. His fingernails were stained a rusty brown. He froze, heart in his throat. There *had* been blood. There was blood on his hand.

He turned around to stare at his dog. Chester was busy trying to snatch dandelion seeds from the air, aggressively attacking the weeds that decorated the porch before jumping back, shocked and sneezing when hundreds of dandelion seeds floated away. Chester's coat showed no sign of any stains. Will frowned and shook his head vigorously, as if to empty water from his ears. He looked at his hand again. Defintely bloody. Looked at his dog. He felt cold all of a sudden, as cold as he'd felt... before.

This was just some strange hallucination, it was all in his head. He didnt know what was real anymore.

Notes for the Chapter:

Wills powers can't actually bring things back to life, his dog was on the brink of death. Will defo thinks he can atm though

2. Scraped knees

Summary for the Chapter:

It's not a dream this time.

The second time it happened, he knew that there was no way it could have been a dream. His Mom and Jonathan had been delighted to have Chester back, although his mysterious disappearance and sudden reappearance perplexed them both. Still, having Chester back made Will happy and, these days, that was all they could ask for. Will himself had tried to forget the morning he had discovered Chester and every time he and El played fetch with him or teased him with treats, he reminded himself firmly that everything he'd seen had been in his head. Just another crazy hallucination. But, of course, nothing could ever be that simple.

It happened at Mike's. His house had always been the meeting point, and that seemed unlikely to change. Dustin's Mom, whilst sweet, was overbearing and continually interrupted their rallies, so his home was ruled out. Will's place was too far out, and held too many reminders of the upside down. Max's place was out of the question. Lucas' Mom, on the other hand, was the most incredible cook and none of them could resist her homemade treats. All of them adored her and his house felt the safest- the closest place they could get to normal in Hawkins. It seemed the most obvious and strongest competitor for base but, although the group would never admit it, Lucas' kid sister intimidated the boys and made his home much more unappealing. Besides, the Wheelers were strangely nonchalant about the children that traipsed in and out of their basement from day to day. So, by an unspoken but unanimous agreement, Mike's place was base.

Will sat on the couch in Mike's basement, cross-legged and smiling softly as he watched his friends. They liked to gather there after school. El and Will had strict curfew rules, set by a frantic Joyce and a justifiably paranoid Hopper. But if they all biked to Mike's straight from school, all five of them together, then they could stay there for a few hours as long as they didn't split up or leave the house. Sometimes Steve would walk them back too, his long strides easily

keeping up as Dustin chattered to him. El was dropped off by car at around the same time, never really outside for more than a few moments. It was nice, Will thought, to just sit and relax. It felt... normal. Across from him, Dustin, Max and Lucas were sat on the floor, bickering over whether they should play games or watch a movie. He grinned as Lucas shoved at Dustin, gesticulating wildly with his arm as he argued. Max huffed and rolled her eyes, feigning disinterest but clearly rooting for Lucas. Next to Will, El sat quietly with her hand in his. Both of them shared an easy, comfortable bond and she had quickly become his family in the weeks following his possession. Mike was right, she just understood. She knew what it was like to be the monster. Every now and then, she would stare at Mike silently until he caught her looking, and they would both smile, blush and look away. They both spent a lot of time blushing and smiling around each other. It was gross. Cute, but gross. Will squeezed her hand.

“You two are so disgusting” he whispered jokingly and she mock frowned, elbowing him in the side.

“Mouth breather,” she returned, with an easy grin. That they could both smile and joke like this made Will's breath catch out of sheer relief and happiness. He loved them, he loved this. He felt safe and happy and *home*. Mike struck up a conversation with El about the science lesson they'd had at school, kneeling up towards them and rocking back on his heels excitedly as he talked. With his free hand, Will reached for the popcorn bowl and came up empty handed.

“Hey, Mike?” He interrupted, gently. Will was always gentle. Mike immediately stopped talking and turned to stare at him with laser intensity.

“Yeah, Will? What's up?” Everything Mike did was so focused and intense. Sometimes being under his scrutiny made Will feel itchy, because Mike gave each and everyone of his friends the same fierce, unadulterated attention and affection. Sometimes it felt undeserved. Will smiled.

“Can I go and get some more popcorn?” He asked, watching with fascination as Mike visibly relaxed from his tensed stance. Half of the time that Will and El spoke or asked for things, he seemed to subconsciously be put on immediate alert, like a suspicious guard dog ready to protect them and bite any potential attacker.

“Oh, sure!” Mike said, with a shrug. “You know where everything is, help yourself.” He immediately launched back into his scientific spiel with El nodding along and smiling indulgently. Will untangled his fingers from El’s and patted the back of her hand as he made to get up.

“I’ll bring down some eggos too, don’t worry,” he staged whispered with a wink and the group laughed.

In the kitchen, he grabbed bowls and searched through the cupboards, wondering where Mike’s parents even were these days. Mr Wheeler was probably asleep, sure, but Mrs Wheeler was usually cooking by now or at least around somewhere. Nancy’s absence made more sense. She was probably with Jonathan. Will grimaced to himself at the thought and continued looking for the eggos. Suddenly, Will heard a small thud and then the door to the kitchen opened.

“M-mommy?” Came a trembling voice and Will spun on his heels to see a red faced, crying Holly Wheeler. He stared helplessly at her for several long moments. She sniffed.

“Where’s mommy?” She asked, looking as if she was on the verge of bawling her eyes out. Will panicked internally, he had no experience with small children and what to do when they cried. He should take her to Mike.

“Uh, s- sorry Holly I don’t know where your Mommy is,” Will stammered out and approached her slowly, trying not to upset her further. “Is everything okay? Do you want Mike? I can take you to see him, he’s just downstairs,” But upon hearing that her Mom was

apparently missing, Holly did actually begin to wail. Will stood in front of her awkwardly. He crouched down to her height- not that there was that much of a difference, really- and tentatively put his hands on her shoulders.

“Hey,” he said softly “What's wrong, Holly?” Holly sniffed again and wiped at her snotty nose, her face streaked with tears.

“I h-hurt my k-knee,” she admitted in a wobbly voice with a hiccup, seeming to calm slightly to Will's surprise. “F-fell over, outside.”

Will nodded and looked down at her knees to see a small bloody scrape. He looked up at her and smiled reassuringly.

“Okay, okay, don't worry” he said soothingly, thinking back to how his brother used to patch him up whenever he got scraped knees, bruised and bloody just from his clumsy falling and playing with his friends.

“We'll clean it up and put a pretty band aid on it, yeah? And then you can come and watch a movie with us, like a big kid. Because you're so brave!” He said and she gave a small little nod, her eyes brightening.

“I c-can?” She asked, hopefully. Will laughed and motioned for her to sit on the kitchen chairs, so that he could get a cloth to wipe at her scraped knees. He found a first aid kit in the cupboards and pulled it out.

“Yeah!” He replied, enthusiastically “Only the bravest girls get to watch big kid movies, like Max and El, and now you!” She giggled in her seat. He crouched before her and placed his hands over her knee, trying to see how deep the cut was. A dizziness swept over him as he did so, his body becoming cold and numb. But his fingertips, they felt warm. A little uncomfortably hot. He shook his head. There was that feeling again, as if he were underwater. Blinking sluggishly, he forced himself to look up only to see Holly looking back down at him, frozen and wide eyed. He quickly looked back down at her knee to see smooth skin. Not a single scratch or scrape on her legs at all. He stared, bewildered. What was going on?

“What the hell?” He whispered, flooded with fear and disbelief. In front of him, Holly clapped her hands and let out a gleeful laugh, swinging her legs like she was never even hurt.

“Magic man!” She declared, pushing herself to her feet “You’re a wizard!” Will stood up too. Had he healed her? He stared down at his hands, turning them back and forth. Nothing felt different, he thought, as he inspected his palms. But he couldn’t excuse this as a dream this time, this was real. He’d healed his dog. Brought his dog back from the dead, seemingly. Somehow. And now he’d healed Mike’s baby sister. Erased her scrapes as if they’d never existed, without even leaving a scar. His heart pounded dangerously as Holly continued to dance around excitably, apparently completely at ease with this complete and utter insanity.

“Hey, Will, what’s taking so long?” Will’s eyes snapped up to meet Mike’s and said nothing. Mike came further into the kitchen, followed by El. Both of them took in the scene with near identical frowns. Will, frozen in the middle of the kitchen, Holly dancing and a first aid kit abandoned on the floor.

“Will?” Mike said, his voice edged with panic and confusion. “What’s going on? Holly?” Will felt himself trembling. Next to Mike, El spoke up.

“Will,” she said softly, coming to stand next to him and placing a hand gently on his shoulder “You’re bleeding,”
And she gently wiped away the blood from his nose.

3. Old battle scars

Summary for the Chapter:

The team gathers to be impressed by Will.

Notes for the Chapter:

I don't know how to paragraph properly. Someone teach me

An emergency meeting was called, spotlight on one Will Byers. Will wasn't sure how they'd gotten from Mike's to his own home. Didn't recall anything really beyond a pair of smooth, unblemished kneecaps and the way he'd felt the world tilt dangerously as he stood, frozen. Upside down, once more. Magic, Holly had called him. Magic man. But Will was not nearly a man, he was just a boy. And magic? Well. Will had always had a rich imagination and in his daydreams he used to like to pretend that he was a powerful sorcerer, casting spells to cover for his weaknesses. A fireball cast against the bullies, his dad, his nightmares. Magic and fantasy pitched against real world horrors that Will, small and ordinary, couldn't fight against alone. He'd always seen magic as comforting and special, something bright. But if his powers were from the upside down, linked intrinsically to his time there and the monster that had taken over his mind, then how could they ever be good?

He felt cold, but warmth pressed against him on either side, a warmth he curled into instinctively. His friends, helping to keep the chill at bay. It was almost an act of defiance, the way he sought out heat. *He* liked it cold but Will Byers did not. Will Byers liked blankets and soft sweaters, sitting by fires with his friends or burrowing down into sleeping bags. Real things. Human things.

Lucas was at his feet, his back against the old couch with a hand wrapped securely around one of Will's ankles. El was beside him with her arms snaked around his waist, thin and frail like his own arms were, but hers felt strong. Mike had his hands in a vice grip, his eyes determined but bright with worry. He could feel Dustin's curls brushing against his calf, where he was leaning. Almost instinctively,

the party had closed ranks around him, as if trying to defend him from harm. Max was perched on the arm of the couch, baseball bat in hand. No-one questioned her mysterious ability to always have a weapon to hand. She should have looked ridiculous but something in the fierceness of her expression rid the situation of any humour, and she looked around as if daring them to laugh at her.

His friends had explained the situation, speaking at once and over each other, the story becoming more fragmented and disjointed with every interjection or correction. Eventually, Max managed to shut everyone up with a glare, letting Mike relay what he'd seen and the whole 'Will has powers now' thing, sparing Will from speaking at all. And now they all sat gathered in the Byer's sitting room, waiting for some sort of plan or decision. These days, for the big stuff, they always worked as a team. Will studiously avoided everyone's gaze. Hopper broke the silence.

"I mean, in a way kid. It makes sense" he said, almost reluctantly, running a hand through his hair. Every pair of eyes in the room settled on the Chief, except from Dustin, who was nodding thoughtfully.

"It was always weird that you survived so long in the Upside Down, Will," Dustin agreed with a half shrug "No-one except El has ever survived as long as you have, down there." Nancy flinched slightly at the reminder of her lost friend from where she sat with Jonathan, who wrapped an arm around her shoulder.

"Besides," Dustin added into the quiet "You two are kinda freakily similar. You can communicate with, like, a single look. You're the quiet, mysterious duo,"

El smiled a little, Will was silent. Joyce stood up, frustrated.

"But my son has never been in a lab! If the upside down is all it takes to get these... powers, half of the room should have some by now," She gestured vaguely at the gathered group with a cigarette clutched in her hand, scattering ash. "It can't be that simple."

"But maybe it's not to do with Hawkins lab at all" Mike said suddenly, frowning in thought "Maybe there's just something different about El and Will. It could be biological, in their DNA or

something.”

“Yeah! Like the X-Men!” Dustin agreed excitedly. Hopper snorted slightly.

“You’re saying they’re mutants?” He asked sceptically, eyebrows raised and voice dry. “X-Men? Really? You guys think they’re superheroes?” Lucas, Mike and Dustin all looked at each other, shrugged and nodded.

“Dude, El can move things with her mind. She’s totally a superhero,” Dustin said and leaned back against Will, folding his arms triumphantly. Hopper rolled his eyes and a few of the group laughed whilst El smirked, amused. Will cleared his throat a little and inwardly winced under everyone’s immediate focused and rapt attention.

“The point is,” he began, rasping a little. He swallowed dryly and Mike squeezed his hand. He tried again. “The point is that I can’t, I don’t know what’s me and what’s. Him. It, I mean.”

Joyce’s face softened and she stubbed her cigarette out on the table.

“Sweetie, Will. That thing is gone. It’s not in you anymore, okay? And it never will be again”

Els arm tightened around him as his Mom spoke and he nodded before shaking his head.

“No, I know Mom. I mean, I can never t-tell what’s real and w-what’s *there*,” his voice cracked, embarrassingly. He shut his eyes, took a breath in. And out. Opened his eyes again. “How do I know I can control this? H-how do I know this is real, that this is me?” Mike’s grip on his hand tightened painfully as he made a small noise of protest, sharing a look with El over the top of his head.

“Will-

“No!” Will spoke forcefully over Mike, “We can’t know that this isn’t another...upside down *thing*. I can’t be a monster again. I won’t.”

El lifted her hand and placed it softly on his face. She waited for him to turn to meet her eyes.

“Not a monster,” she insisted, softly. “We promise.” Her hand moved to rest on his chest and she smiled. “This is good. I can tell. Trust me?” Will stared at her for a long moment and then jerked his head.

Not quite a nod but near enough.

"Yes." He whispered. Hopper moved from where he'd been leaning against the wall.

"Listen, kid. You, El and half of Hawkins has been, and continues to be, affected by the Upside Down. If she can tell that this power is 'good' somehow, then that's good enough for me" Here Hopper shrugged, with the air of someone who was raising a child who threw regular superpower tantrums and could take whatever you threw at them. "We'll keep an eye on it, Will. Don't worry."

Lucas then tapped at his knee to claim his attention, smiling reassuringly with the confidence of someone who had a plan.

"There's a way we can tell for sure. That you're in control," he said. Will's brow furrowed, clearly about to protest, and he rushed to explain himself. "Just, someone should hurt themselves, like a small cut, and you can try to deliberately heal them this time. I mean, you've kinda just done it by fluke so far."

There was a general murmur of assent and Will sat up straighter, leaning forward.

"I don't know..." he murmured, feeling uncomfortable at the prospect of deliberately using his powers. He stared around at everyone, slightly blank, but the idea seemed to have been met with mostly enthusiasm. Joyce came to stand behind Will, stroking her hands up and down his shoulders and arms comfortingly.

"Honey, you don't have to do anything if it makes you uncomfortable. But maybe you should, just, give this a try? You might feel better," He leaned back and turned to face her. She looked more hopeful than afraid. Everyone here trusted him completely. It was a scary thought. Hopper lit his own cigarette and took a drag.

"Kid, they're healing powers. Healing. You're not gonna hurt anyone with that," he said with slight smile.

In the background, kitchen drawers rattled and then his friends were moving, opening up the party and letting an outsider into the ranks. Or, not quite an outsider. Nancy was crouched in front of him, knife

in hand and looking up at him encouragingly. It took Will a second to catch up as he eyed the knife warily. She reached towards him and showed him a scar on her hand, clearly old and stretched silver across her palm.

"An old battle wound," she confided with a wink, and then, without warning, gently drew the knife blade across the line of the scar, hissing between her teeth. She handed the knife over to Max to hold, who lit up like Christmas had come early. Hopper sighed in exasperation, scrubbing a hand down his face. Jesus H. Christ, these kids were going to be the death of him. Will freed his hands from Mike's and took Nancy's into his own hesitantly, conscious of the many expectant gazes on him. Nancy smiled.

"What's the diagnosis then?" She joked "Break it to me easy," And just like that, with one stupid joke, any tension or misgivings Will had evaporated. It would be fine.

He closed his eyes and reached for warmth, not cold. It felt weird to try and just 'do magic' so he tried to remember the times before and the desperation he'd felt, hunched over his dog. He'd willed Chester back to life. So now he put his imagination to good use and pictured skin fusing together seamlessly, imagined the edges of the cut on her hand being pulled back together by imaginary, invisible stitches. His fingers felt hot and heavy against Nancy's palm. As a familiar dizziness swept over him he renewed his focus. No blood, he willed. Just clean and new again.

The next second, Nancy yanked her hand back and his eyes flew open, watching as she examined it closely, sucking in a surprised breath as she did so. Everyone watched and waited. Nancy let out a disbelieving laugh as she studied the place where her cut had been, before presenting her hand to Will for him to inspect. A collective sigh of relief was shared, whilst Mike and Dustin let out simultaneous gleeful whoops. Max and Lucas reached to high-five Will and then each other. Even Hopper managed a smile. There wasn't even a scar.

Surrounded by his friends and family, with the knowledge that he could perform actual, real magic, Will let himself laugh along with

them.

Notes for the Chapter:

I literally have no idea where I'm going with this.
Lemme know if there's anything you'd like to see me
explore lmao

Maybe a bit more angsty will healing himself from
bullies?? (Hmu at the strangest byers.tumblr.com)

4. Dad Steve

Summary for the Chapter:

Completely plotless wish fulfilment. Was meant to be longer but it's been a Week.

Notes for the Chapter:

I came so close to giving Steve a minivan. So close.

It was freezing. They'd all scrambled for their bikes the moment they'd noticed the clouds darkening, abandoning AV club in a desperate attempt to avoid the rain. But bikes could only go so fast, especially when half of the route to Mike's house was uphill. Will felt the first drops of rain as he cycled next to Lucas, who was mid sentence discussing his latest comic. The next second, it was as if the sky upended buckets of rain and it began to pour.

Dustin let out an undignified squawk and frantically grabbed his backpack to try and protect his hair from the rain, leaving only one hand free to steer. For some reason that he refused to explain to the group, although they had all had a pretty good idea of the reason behind it, he had become fixated on how his hair looked and experimented with styles obsessively. His bike wobbled and careened into Mike's, who nearly fell.

"Dustin, quit it! No-one gives a shit about your stupid hair!" He shouted through the rain, his anger rendered completely ineffective due to how ridiculous he looked as he yelled, his hair sopping wet and plastered to his forehead. Dustin glared, ready to defend his hair-sprayed nest ("It's not just hair, Mike, it's art. You wouldn't understand, not with your mophead") to the grave, and put his other hand back on the bike handles, forgetting his hair for a moment in order to swerve violently towards Mike in retaliation. Mike biked away and stuck out his tongue. But before anything could escalate into a full argument, a truck pulled up to drive alongside them.

"Hey, dipshits! Wanna ride?" Steve's head appeared out of the truck's

rolled down window, his eyes squinting against the wind and rain.

“How is that even a question?” Lucas asked and wheeled his bike over, throwing it in the back with Steve’s help. Steve stacked up their bikes one by one and shepherded them into the truck, like a mother and her ducklings. It was a bit of a squeeze and Max ended up sprawled across the boys’ laps in the back, her foot ‘accidentally’ kicking Mike or Lucas every so often. Will was sat, pride of place, in the front seat with Steve. Will always got the front seat, despite the protests of the others, because he was, as Steve put it, “a goddamn saint compared to all of you other little shits”. He also tended to sit quietly next to Steve and make polite conversation rather than prodding him or poking him, fiddling with the radio until it broke or actually physically trying to fight him for the steering wheel (“God, I have driven us all before you know!” Max had huffed, after being banned from the front. “Don’t remind me,” Steve had returned with a shudder).

In the back, Mike did a remarkable impression of a wet dog as he shook the rain from his hair, laughing as Max got sprayed with some of the droplets. He leaned forwards between the two front seats, to annoy Steve if he could, and noticed how dry Will seemed to be in comparison to the rest of them.

“Hey, Will, how come you didn’t get wet?” Mike asked. He was pretty convinced that Will didn’t have a secret coat or umbrella with him anywhere.

Will was staring out of the window into the rain.

“Shield kept me dry,” he replied absently. Mike frowned. Steve turned to Will, wondering when his life would return to something more normal where people actually made sense when they spoke.

“Uhh what shield, buddy?” He asked, uncertainly. Will looked up to see the occupants of the vehicle staring at him.

“Oh!” He exclaimed “Sorry guys, I forgot to tell you! Me and El have been kind of, practising? Our powers, I mean. And turns out I can make this sort of shield thing?”

Steve nodded. Right, okay. Magic powers were just everyday occurrences and were no biggy whatsoever. What was one measly conjured up rain-shield anyway?

“Dude!”

“That's so cool!”

“Holy shit!”

Came the chorus from the back and Will laughed. There wasn't much demand for healing powers in Hawkins, really, as long as it wasn't being attacked by creatures of the Upside Down. It was pretty cool to discover another use for them, especially one that was just sort of helpful and mostly mundane. He sat and picked at his nails, itching to see El. She'd struggled with her powers for a lot longer and what with her complicated history and his deep rooted fear of anything connected to the upside down, willingly practising “magic” was a slow and unnatural process for them both. El's feelings towards using them were tangled up in a mess of emotions. Her time at Hawkins lab meant that she'd learned to control her powers out of fear, anger and brute force. It was clear that using them simply because she wanted to was a more unfamiliar concept. Both of them were hesitant but together, it could be quite fun. Plus, he knew the group would find it fascinating and would happily sit and watch.

As they were getting out of the truck, a mad scramble for the doors, Will noticed how red Steve's knuckles were, red with what looked like blood, wrapped tightly round the steering wheel. He undid his seatbelt and leaned across with a deep breath. Practise made perfect, right?

“Lemme fix that for you?” Will asked in a small voice and Steve looked up, startled.

“What?”

“Your hands. Fighting with Billy again?” Steve nodded automatically. Will didn't wait for permission and instead rested his hands on top of bloody knuckles, closing his eyes.

“Will, kid, it's fine.” Steve insisted “Save your strength for the important stuff, like the next time Dustin falls off his bike” He made to move his hands but Will just leaned back smugly. It was rare that he felt that he could take pride in things. These were his talents now, like two definable traits, art and healing the idiots around him that kept getting themselves hurt. Steve stared down at his good-as-new hands in surprise.

“Okay, wow, that's super freaky but totally cool” Will was quiet. “Freaky?” He asked with forced nonchalance and Steve's eyes widened in panic.

“No! Ah, um, not freaky! Not a freak all! Nope. Just not used to the whole, you know,” He made a vague, sweeping gesture with his arm “Magic powers thing.” Will folded his arms and fixed Steve with a sceptical stare.

“It's okay, you don't have to lie.” He said with a sigh “I know none of this normal. I don't mind being a freak, really. And freak is better than ‘zombie boy’ or ‘faggot’, anyway.”

“Hey!” Steve interrupted fiercely “I wouldn't care even if you were a half-dead, queer, wand-waving demadog. You're just a kid. And anyone that's calling you a freak or a...a fag, for whatever reason, you shouldn't listen to them, okay?” Will sat still, almost sullen. It was the closest Steve had seen him to being in a sulk. He had found himself in the position of official babysitter for this rag and tag group of kids and was strangely protective of them. Whenever he saw Billy near Max he reacted like a dog with its hackles raised. He'd also known instinctively that Will was clearly more of a target than the others but he'd not realised how rough a time the poor guy had clearly had.

“You're in high school soon, right? Fresh start, new friends and all that.” He suggested, although half heartedly. Will outright snorted.

"Sure," he agreed bitterly "I'll be the smallest in the entire school, an even easier target. I know how high school went for my brother, I'm not exactly hopeful" Steve's heart broke a little and he thought how unfair it was that Will Byers was not just a victim of the supernatural but of real world horrors too. He reached out and ruffled his hair gently to try and diffuse some of the tension.

"If anyone gives you any crap, I'll beat them up," Steve offered, faking offence when Will cracked up at the idea. Tension successfully diffused. He mentally awarded himself a point, score 1 to Steve.

"If you do that I'll have to keep using my powers to heal you. I mean, even my brother can beat you in a fight, Steve."

Steve winced dramatically and clutched a hand to his heart, causing Will to laugh harder. Steve smiled, it was good to make him laugh. It was a small victory.

"Ouch, Byers, I thought I was the braver and older role model you'd always dreamed for. I'm supposed to help all of you guys, not the other way around" Will stopped and shook his head near violently as his face turned serious.

"No way. If I've learned anything from the stuff that's happened, it's that we've all got each other's backs. So I'm always going to have to be fixing your knuckles for all the bullies you punch on our behalf,"

There was a sudden rap on the truck windows and they both jumped. Mike's face was pressed to the glass, nose all squashed and his breath steaming.

"Willllllll" he whined "Are you coming or would you rather hang with Steve?" His face twisted disdainfully at the thought.

Will grinned and shrugged half apologetically at Steve.

"Guess I gotta go," he said and grabbed his backpack. Mike had rejoined the others where they stood with their bikes and Will made

to follow. As he opened the door, he turned back hesitantly to Steve, seemingly locked in an internal struggle.

“Steve. Say that people at school were right about me being a bit... different,” he paused, reached for the right words “Would...would you still mean what you said? That it wouldn't matter?”

Steve looked at him, comprehension dawning and winced internally. The future was not going to be kind to Will Byers. But he answered truthfully and the only way he could.

“It wouldn't matter in the slightest.” He said and Will nodded. He shouldered his bag and Steve watched fondly as the kids all pushed and shoved each other into the house. He started the engine and pulled away.

Notes for the Chapter:

I do actually have a vague sense of plot for this, I swear. Very vague. But still there. Will probably do a superpower kids vs. bullies next chapter!

5. Rain, rain, go away

Summary for the Chapter:

Will suffers even more. Including, but not limited to, a blatant lack of knowledge over American lockers, a complete disregard for any lesson/lunch situation that would make sense and generally just some bad writing.

Notes for the Chapter:

Okay, kinda got a bit derailed towards the end so it just kinda. Stops. Also hasn't been properly edited yet, feel free to point out mistakes bc I'll edit it later. But here ya go!

It rained for a week straight. It was relentless, turning the land surrounding the Byers home into swampy marshland. In a town as small as Hawkins, the weather quickly became a hot topic of conversation and wherever you went it was debated. Local farmers could be heard grumbling over their ruined crops; kids could be found debating if school would be flooded and finally closed whilst mothers in supermarkets commiserated together over the bouts of flu and colds that had started to spread. The news was also concerned with little else but the weather. Will sat at the kitchen table, listening intently to the weather warnings from the radio as Jonathon slid scrambled eggs onto his plate.

“For some reason this downpour just really won't seem to leave us alone,” the radio host declared over a sigh of whistling static “Make sure you dress up warm and dry, folks, because this bad weather looks like it's set to stay, seems that Hawkins might be cursed to stay gloomy this month.”

Will aggressively speared his toast and eggs and shovelled them into his mouth as the funny feeling that had followed him around all week settled deeper into his gut. The toast felt stuck in his throat and he made an effort to swallow rubbery egg and sawdust, tasting nothing.

He looked across the table and exchanged a significant look with El, whose solemn face matched his own. Something just felt wrong. El flicked her eyes towards his Mom and Jonathan, and raised an eyebrow. *Do we tell them?* Will quickly shook his head at her. She frowned. For a brief moment they argued silently, engaged in an intense stare-off before they were interrupted as the door slammed open and Hopper stumbled through, drenched. Whenever he was out late on whatever chief business he had to investigate, El always stayed at the Byers until he returned. In fact, El and Hopper rarely *left* the Byers. El immediately winked at Will, their dispute momentarily forgotten, and levitated a towel towards Hopper's dripping form, who grabbed for it with an eye roll.

"No need to show off, kid" he muttered good-naturedly and El smiled.

"You're welcome, Pops" she returned sweetly, before sending a pillow flying across the room to hit him in the face. He spluttered and El wiped at her nose with a small grin. Joyce pressed a mug of coffee into Hopper's hands and pushed him in the general direction of the couch, piling more blankets into his arms. He collapsed into the cushions, grumbling about the "stupid goddamn rain" and the "crazy people of Hawkins". He yawned and sipped his coffee.

"This rain is really bad" he said matter of factly and Will stood up abruptly, his chair scraping across the floor. He excused himself- it wasn't really that unusual for him to leave half of what was on his plate these days- and made to go to his room to get his school stuff. He didn't need to hear about Chief Hopper's late night adventures in the rain. He didn't want to think about the stupid rain at all. But he felt the weight of El's gaze heavy on his back as he made his escape and tried not to feel too guilty. It wasn't worth worrying anyone over a feeling, was it?

His mood remained dark at school, to match the sky outside, he thought bitterly. El had accompanied him on the journey, insisting on riding in the car to "see Will off" as she sometimes did. She had then proceeded to send him reproachful glances the entire way. The fifteen minutes it took to start the car and get it out of the waterlogged mud surrounding their home was painfully awkward

and Will had spent it staring resolutely out of the window. Fortunately, Jonathan hadn't commented on the unusual silence between the two and instead chose to blast his music at a higher volume than usual. But when Will had left the car, El had leaned forward and hugged him, and whispered in his ear.

"If the rain doesn't stop today, we have to tell them." He'd met her gaze and he softened slightly at the worry in her eyes, although inwardly he still felt scared and stubborn. They hadn't talked about it, but both of them knew. The weather left them sick to their stomachs in a way that only the Upside Down could. It was a feeling they both recognised and that Will was uncomfortably familiar with. He'd nodded at her in resignation, knowing she was right but overcome with apprehension and weariness. Will was pretty sure you weren't meant to aggravate the monster. It felt like drawing attention to these things was like poking a predator with a stick. Would their lives ever get to be normal?

To make things worse, Troy had caught a glimpse of El and Will as he'd gotten out of the car and so dished out his usual hissed jabs and insults to Will with a particularly vicious edge. Troy feared and hated El, but knew that he was helpless against her. A measly, freaky girl. El "Jane" Hopper was the town's worst kept secret. Many people knew of her existence, but as was typical of the residents of Hawkins, anything that was out of the ordinary went largely and deliberately ignored. Having a chief as a parent also meant that Troy's case against El for physical assault had been swept aside by the police department.

So Troy clearly harboured a lot of resentment towards her, more than he held for their entire group. And clearly, Troy had no qualms over taking out his frustration on his most favourite target, Will. Will didn't share this particular class with his friends, except from Max, but she was sat at the back and seemed not to have noticed the taunts. The bell rang. Will shoved his books into his rucksack at lightening speed and made a beeline for the door, not even pausing to wait for Max to catch up. It was lunch anyway, and his and Max's lockers were at different ends of the school. They'd see each other in the cafeteria.

It was weird, usually he'd tune out Troy's insults. After the hundredth

“fairy” or “faggot”, you kind of became numb to any hurt or offence that the words were meant to cause. But today, fear mingled with his growing sense of unease. There had been intent behind today's barbs. Will bit his lip as he fumbled with the padlock of his locker. Troy had never escalated his bullying of the group to anything beyond taunting and the occasional shove or tripping up. Today though...he'd seemed practically manic. Something about seeing Will and El riled him up, it was like their combined freakiness was just too much for him to handle.

“Hey, fairy boy!” Will heard, shouted down the hallway. He groaned to himself and prayed that some miraculous escape would present itself to him soon, before turning around. Troy advanced, looking red in the face with inexplicable fury. It would have been funny, had Will not been all too aware of how empty the halls were and how much bigger Troy was than him, how he towered over Will now.

“Hey faggot, I'm talking to you!” And Will felt the air rush from his lungs as two hands shoved him backwards, slamming him into the lockers. Troy had a malicious grin on his face.

“Your freaky friends aren't here to help you out now, huh? Maybe they realised not to touch a dirty, fairy boy like you.” Will struggled against the hands that had him pinned, but he knew it was useless. In the back of his mind, as he struggled, he absently wondered how far Troy really intended to go this time.

Troy continued to yell at him, spit flying into Will's face but Will kept his eyes fixedly on the floor, retreating in on himself. He'd faced monsters worse than this and he refused to panic. He wouldn't. Troy shook him violently and Will looked up. His eyes felt dull and vacant, and seemed to anger Troy further, who took this numbness as an apparent lack of fear. He drew his fist back and Will flinched and closed his eyes, preparing for the blow. But none came. Will cracked open one eye only to see a fist, centimetres from his face but blocked from causing him harm. Ah, crap. His shield. For a long, unsteady moment, Troy and Will stared at each other. And then Troy's face took on a strange, animalistic quality as he paled, eyes flickering between his frozen fist and Will. Blood pooled under Will's nose and, helpless to wipe it away, trickled over his lip and slowly fell. Both of

them watched it's descent as if it were in slow motion, and Will felt a dawning sense of horror as the droplet of blood splashed red on the toe of Troy's sneakers.

"Y-you," he stuttered "You freak!" He stared at the blood on his shoe, eyes wild. Two hands tightened in the fabric of Will's shirt. "You should be locked up, you and your freaky, adopted, lab-rat sister!" In the distance, something slammed, a classroom door maybe, and Troy jerked back to himself. With a glance to each end of the corridor, he drew back his fist again and Will sagged, almost relieved. A beating he could take. A beating he could heal. The next second, he was unceremoniously stuffed backwards into his own locker and he felt his eyes widen in panic, heart pounding.

"No wait!" He started and scrambled forwards. But the door swung shut on him with a resounding bang.

"This is what they do to animals like you, Byers." Troy spat, evidently fearful of whatever he'd just witnessed. "They lock them up."

Will slammed his fists against the locker door, desperately. The dark pressed in on him from all sides and he leaned towards the small strips of light that filtered in through the slats of the door, trying to look out.

"Let me out! Troy, let me out!" He cried, hammering on the metal. He choked back a sob. "Please!"
But he'd already gone.

'It's okay,' Will thought desperately, wrapping his arms around himself but tightly. He'd been surrounded by darkness like this before, for a year had felt as if he carried it around with him. And that was before he'd lived with a shadow inside him and had actually been consumed by hollow black emptiness. He took a great, gasping gulp of musty air and breathed in the scent of waxed school floors and pencil sharpenings. It was just school. He scrabbled around blindly for something comforting to hold because everything felt cold

and dark. Like before. Cold and dark and alone. Come on, didn't he keep a sweater in here somewhere? His gym clothes, even.

"Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry," he whispered fiercely, like a mantra or prayer, and his fingers closed around something that felt like flannel, one of Jonathan's old shirts, maybe, that he'd lent Will for warmth and comfort. He clutched it now, like a lifeline, and burrowed his face into the fabric as he tried to calm his racing heart. His chest heaved and he could feel his control slipping, each ragged breath bring him closer to the brink of hyperventilating, spiralling into a full bloomed panic attack. Around him, the darkness pressed ever closer.

In the cafeteria, Mike glanced at his watch anxiously for the third time that minute.

"Guys, seriously, where's Will?" He demanded tersely, eyes intent on Max who had seen Will last. She frowned in concern, and glanced at her own watch, as if seeming to realise the length of time that had passed. She shrugged, helplessly.

"He ran out before I could even speak to him," she said "I just assumed he was in a rush to get to lunch." They all exchanged mutual, worried glances.

Lucas patted Mike's arm, always the one for reassurances and logic.

"He probably just got sidetracked talking to someone," he put forward, reasonably. But Mike was anxious. And an anxious Mike was like a dog with a bone- he wouldn't let up.

"But everyone's here!" Mike said, scanning the tables around him for anyone missing "And who does he ever talk to anyway, except us?"

"A teacher maybe?" Dustin suggested, but it was weakly given. Will would never willingly speak to teachers alone at the best of times, and since his time at the lab and The Incident, he'd become

increasingly more distrustful toward authority figures and adults, except for Joyce and Hopper.

“Everyone's here but Will,” Mike repeated and then felt his blood run cold as he clocked who else was also absent

“Everyone's here... except Troy,” Mike stated slowly, and all four of his friends froze. Max looked the most alarmed.

“He left math almost as fast as Will,” she said in a tone of horror “And I didn't even notice, oh my god,” Mike stood up instantly, shoving his tray of food away. The party followed suit and they all practically ran from the room, ignoring the multiple pairs of eyes their sudden movement had attracted.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit, shit, shit,” Dustin panted as they ran down the corridor. Mike ignored him; he could hear his own blood rushing in his ears. Bad things happened to Will when he was left on his own. He felt a surge of anger. This was why you never left a party member on their own. It was practically rule number one. Never let anyone, especially Will, go anywhere alone. He skidded around the corner, and stared down the hall where Will's locker was. Neither Troy nor Will were there.

“The bathroom?” Lucas gasped out but Mike shook his head. He shushed them all with an impatient wave of his hand.

“You guys hear that?”

They all went silent, moving slowly down the hall. Even their soft footfalls seemed to echo off the walls. And then, a sniff.

“That's Will,” Dustin breathed and then they all began to yell.

“WILL!”

“Will?!”

Max and Lucas spun comically on the spot, whilst Dustin's gaze darted wildly to the ceiling, as if Will would just appear on

command, hanging there.

“He’s in the lockers!” Mike exclaimed, suddenly, and all five of them sprinted, feet pounding against the hard linoleum floor. Mike hammered on the locker door.

“Will! It’s us, it’s Mike!” He said, frantically “You in there?” His only reply was a pathetic, keening sob.

“Son of a bitch,” Dustin cursed, angrily “That sick, son-of-a-bitch, bastard.”

Lucas turned to Mike.

“What’s his locker combination?” He urged, spurring Mike into action. He fumbled for the lock on the door and twisted at the dials, heart in his throat. After what felt like an age, the lock clicked open and they all shared simultaneous sighs of relief. Without hesitation, Mike swung the door wide. Will stared back, eyes glazed and his cheeks tear stained, a plaid flannel shirt clutched to his chest. But he smiled, wanly, as the light of the corridor washed over him.

Mike reached a hand out hesitantly and tugged Will out of the locker and into his arms. For a moment, Will tensed up and seemed like he wanted to struggle away. But then he let out a strangled, hiccuping laugh that threatened to devolve into sobbing at any moment and slumped against Mike’s chest, who tightened his arms around him. Dustin flung his arms over the two of them, Lucas and Max following at a more sedate pace, and they sunk to the floor in a messy pile of hugs. Max ran her hand through Will’s hair, whispering apologies over and over for letting him leave alone. They stayed like that, a tangle of limbs, until Will’s gasps evened out to slower, steadier breaths. He burrowed his face into Mike’s shoulder, and squeezed the hand that was gripped in his, probably Dustin’s.

“S-sorry,” Will muttered “Dark a-always gets m-me.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for, dude,” Lucas said, in a tone that allowed for no argument. They broke apart, slowly disentangling, and Will leaned back against the lockers, pulling his knees to his chest. Dustin settled on the floor, cross-legged, whilst the others kneeled back.

“Was it Troy?” Dustin asked, despite already knowing the answer. Will nodded mutely and raised his eyes heavenward.

“He tried to hit me and, obviously, he couldn't” Will explained, quietly “And so I guess that kind of freaked him out,” Mike had tensed visibly at the story, fury bubbling under his skin at the idea of Troy even attempting to hurt Will in any way.

“Jesus, what a maniac,” Max breathed, “Do you, do you think he'll tell people? About the powers?” Will laughed, wearily.

“No, I don't think anyone would believe him. He just really hates me now,”

Lucas gritted his teeth and shuffled closer.

“Well, we're not letting him near you again!” He said, angrily and they all nodded earnestly. “We'll protect you!”

Will smiled, grateful, but his expression was fierce.

“You know,” he said, thoughtfully, with dark eyes “Nothing he can do will ever come close to Him.” At this, everyone froze, because Will never spoke of The Incident. He didn't even like to refer to his powers directly, because of the connection it gave him to the Upside Down. Will continued, in a soft and trembling voice, almost as if speaking to himself, or in a trance. “I know what it feels like to be burned alive. Nothing is worse than that. It doesn't come close. So, whatever he wants to do to me, I can deal with it.” Mike looked at Will, horrified. Hundreds of protests were on the tip of his tongue and he wanted to shake Will (except he would never even come close to being aggressive like that with Will) and scream at him that out of everyone, nobody deserved a break more than Will. *You deserve happiness!* He wanted to yell, but he felt stunned into silence. All of them were. It was Max that reached out, and grabbed his shoulder firmly.

“Will, I may be the newest here, but I speak for everyone when I say this. You're a dumbass,” She stared him down and Will blinked in surprise “You've been through a lot, I get it. But that was the

stupidest I have ever heard. We are your friends. And you should never, ever have to deal with that again. Even if you've had it worse or it's "manageable". If Troy touches you, he's dead. El can bitch slap him with her mind or something. Okay?" Lucas grinned and Will stared at her in shock, seemingly torn between mild offence and hurt, gratefulness and confusion, before snorting with laughter and nodding his head frantically. They all relaxed, that was genuine Will-was-happy laughter.

"Okay! Fine!" He agreed "You're scary, okay, I get it, you'll protect me." Max nodded, satisfied, and they hauled him to his feet. He knew his friends would look out for him, without a doubt. It just sometimes seemed easier to accept his fate, of being a freak and as someone that should be punished. He had been on the brink of death twice in the last year. When he'd instructed them to close the gate, he knew it would be unlikely that he'd survive. He'd welcomed it, practically, sick and tired of being weak and unable to fight against the monsters. It was him, after all, that was responsible for the murder, the deaths, of innocent people. Nothing could ever change that.

But with arms slung over his shoulders, one round his waist, and his friends chatter all around, he felt some of that guilt and numbness drain away. He felt light, buoyed up in a way that only his friends and family could make him feel, it was as if he were floating-

"Hey, is it me or is the rain getting even heavier?" Came Dustin's voice and Will's train of thoughts came to an abrupt halt. He felt that familiar tingle and heavy gut feeling and was suddenly sick to his stomach. If he'd been sat at his desk, he'd have hit his head against the desk with a long suffering thunk. Could today get any worse?

Notes for the Chapter:

Also, this fic is obviously very Will-centric & tbh I don't really care about any of the relationships except their friendships. It's middle school, how serious can they be. I'll probably just stick to the canon ones as the background pairings unless requested otherwise! (+ jopper and gay will, ofc)

6. Chapter 6

The fact that Will could sense an ominous feeling from a bit of rain spoke volumes about his connection to the Upside Down. After begging his friends not to mention the locker incident to Joyce, knowing that she would panic and overreact, he'd ditched the group and made his way to the Hawkins cemetery. He spent more time there than he'd like to admit. Today, stupidly, he'd forgotten to bring an umbrella or a coat and so he stood in the downpour, staring hopelessly at the gravestone in front of him. "Bob Newby", read the headstone, in smooth calligraphy. Will reached and touched the wet stone. The worst part of his powers was this. That he couldn't bring Bob back. His Mom would never ask him to try, and he would never, ever tell her that he had. Because he had tried. Desperately. But he'd discovered the limits of his power at this gravesite.

He'd nearly killed himself trying to pour energy into the soil where Bob Newby lay, had reached for his powers until his face was caked in dried blood and his head had pounded. He'd blacked out and woken hours later in the dirt, the grass around him dull and grey as if he'd channeled their energy and stolen their life. He'd sobbed into the ground until he was numb, that day. Sometimes, he wondered how much more he could realistically take, of this guilt and despair and horror.

As much as his Mom and friends reassured him that they didn't blame him, for what he'd done when he'd been possessed, he knew that it was his fault. And they knew it too, even if it was subconsciously, he knew that a small part of them probably resented him. After all, he was a murderer. And he'd thought that, maybe, his power could undo that. But death, apparently, was a line he couldn't cross.

As he stared at the gravestone, cold crept into his lungs and clawed its way up his throat until he felt choked with grief and guilt. The rain on his skin was oppressive and dirty. It didn't feel right at all. Each droplet of rain was tinged with the strangeness of the Upside Down. He recognised the feeling, it was alien and reminiscent of things he'd touched and felt in his week spent there.

"We could really do with you right now, Bob." Will whispered. The

graveyard remained silent. "I'm sorry."

All he could do was apologise. Over and over. He wondered if it would ever feel like enough.

He lingered a moment longer, before reluctantly heading to the cemetery gates. He knew that El was waiting for him there. Both of them were connected now, through their powers and the Upside Down. And connected by a familial bond, too, if Will tried to put a positive spin on it. So they could usually tell where the other was, and sense each other. He knew that it was time to stop pretending everyone was okay and that he had to tell the others about whatever darkness and danger lay ahead. This stupid rain.

When he reached her, El took his hand in silence. She never offered any meaningless platitudes or tried to dissuade him from these surely unhealthy visits. El harboured her own guilt and ways of coping. To stop him would have been hypocritical. He met her eyes and gave a firm nod. He wanted to face the Upside Down head on, fight it, and win. Like a hero. The sort of hero that Bob Newby had been. El squeezed his hand.

"I think it's time for some sunshine." She said, with an easy smile. In spite of the day he'd had, he couldn't help but grin back. She made it sound as if they were just going out to dinner or something.

At the Byers household, his makeshift family had gathered, presumably at El's request but then Will couldn't be sure. The party went most places together, and being gathered at Will's, or more commonly, Mike's, wasn't unusual. Mike bounded over the second the pair stepped across the threshold, like an excitable dog (Will's actual dog was stretched luxuriously across Max's lap and the couch).

"Will! Where've you been? You're soaked." Mike said, in concern. Will had seemed fine the rest of the day, despite the locker incident, but Will was very good at keeping his emotions hidden.

"I'm okay, Mike." Will replied, softly.

"Stop fussing, Mike. Leave your boyfriend alone." Max said with an exaggerated eye-roll.

"He's not my boyfriend." Mike and Will chorused simultaneously, and El smothered a grin. It was difficult to define what they all were to each other. El and Mike danced around each other, and Will was someone both of them would fight someone for without blinking. But El and Max were close too, and Will was able to confide in Dustin far more than the others. They were all each other's family, really. They loved each other. Will wandered over to Max and smiled when Chester rolled haphazardly off of her lap and came to greet him. The party watched, fondly, as Will fussed and played with his ears, spluttering with laughter whenever he pushed his wet nose in his face. Will looked up to see them all staring.

"What?" He asked, self consciously.

"You're just too adorable, Will." Lucas teased and dodged the cushion Will threw his way.

"Is Pops here?" El asked, over the chatter, and Hopper stepped into the room before anyone could answer, Joyce hovering behind him.

"Hey, Jane." He said, warmly, and strode over. Hopper, Joyce and Nancy were the only ones that called her Jane. Will only called El 'Jane' when they were bickering, or if they were in public together. Hopper ruffled El's hair before placing both of his hands on her shoulder, firmly. He drew her back, giving her a quick, cursory glance to check that she was unharmed. Will doubted he even knew he did it. His protective instincts for El, or Jane Hopper, were so ingrained that they were just automatic now.

"Is something wrong, kiddo?" He asked and she nodded, once. Will stepped closer, for moral support and she took his hand in a vice grip.

"Something is really bad. But we don't know what, exactly."

The room went completely quiet and still. They'd all been unsubtly eavesdropping on El and Hopper's exchange. Dustin glanced around at everyone, who'd all suddenly paused mid conversations, in confusion. He frowned over at El and Hopper.

"Why's everyone gone quiet? What did I miss?" He hissed to Steve, in a conspicuous whisper. The bubble of tension that had been brought

about by El's statement burst and everyone laughed, if a little shakily. Lucas flicked Dustin's ear, electing to ignore Steve's disapproving, "I'm-disappointed-in-you-son" glare.

"Pay attention, dummy." Lucas said, in exasperation. "Shit's hit the fan again. Bad things are happening." Dustin's eyes widened.

"Ohhhhh!" He said in comprehension and then whipped his head around to stare at El. "Wait, is it the Upside Down again?"

"Yes." Will answered for her and winced under everyone's immediate rapt attention. "It's raining."

Everyone looked at Will, confused by his rather obvious statement. Max was shaking her head sadly. Maybe he'd finally snapped. Dustin squinted at Will.

"Will." He said, slowly and clearly. "It's been raining for a week. Surely you've noticed." Will seemed unfazed.

"Exactly. A whole week, non-stop. It's not normal rain." Will agreed and there was another pause as everyone digested this. Will didn't know how to explain the strange sensation he felt every time the rain touched his skin. The bitter tang of metal in his mouth that accompanied the grey clouds.

"Sweetie, the rain is heavy, sure, but a week of rain? That's not too unusual." Joyce said, carefully. Will turned pleading eyes on El and she came to the rescue, as usual.

"The rain isn't normal" She said, confidently. They all focused on her, because when it came to the supernatural and alternate dimensions, she was their expert. "We know because it feels like the Upside Down. We can sense it." Mike turned very pale.

"How can you sense it? What do you mean? Are you both okay? Does it hurt? Does the rain hurt you when you go outside?" He demanded, voice increasing in speed and pitch throughout his jumbled stream of rapid, panic-fuelled questions. Will and El exchanged glances.

"It just feels strange. It doesn't hurt, it's just...the Upside Down." Will said, shrugging helplessly. "It's like, I'm always aware of the Upside

Down. But since it started raining, it's so much closer." They all turned to stare at the rain lashing against the windows.

"It wants something." Will murmured, with an edge of frustration, and a low roll of thunder echoed his ominous statement. Hopper pulled El aside once more and murmured something to her in a low tone. Mike moved back to the couch, though he was loathe to leave Will and miss out on their speculations, and flung himself down onto the cushions.

"I've always hated the rain," Mike announced, wrinkling his nose. Max made a face too and nodded, emphatically. She was used to sunnier weather.

"No way, man!" Dustin said. "Rain is great, and thunderstorms are even better. Except this rain of course." Dustin added hastily, but he needn't have bothered. Hopper had begun to whisper urgently with Joyce, whilst El and Will stood slightly away from them, now, staring into each other's eyes. Probably communicating, somehow.

"Hey, guys, fun fact, did you know that lightening kills more people than tornadoes, each year?" Dustin said, inanely, to fill the silence. Mike shuddered.

"That wasn't a fun fact." Lucas said, flatly.

"God, I hate storms." Mike said, visibly paler just from the thought. "They're horrible."

Will's eyes snapped to Mike and widened in dawning horror. He looked as if he'd just seen a ghost.

"That's it." He said. "It's Mike." Everyone stared at him in confusion but Will ignored them, turning to El.

"When I was possessed by...*Him*. I recognised Mike. He pulled me out. He encouraged me to be a spy." He started to explain and El looked similarly horrified.

"I...I looked for Mike. In the Upside Down." She confessed, although no one but Will seemed to understand what exactly she was confessing. "I yelled for Mike. Oh....Will..." Her eyes were fearful and Will squeezed her hand, but his heart was pounding. Will turned back to Mike.

"Mike, have you had any nightmares this week?"

Mike looked startled by the question and his eyes flicked around the room at everyone who was listening.

"Uhhh, yes?" He said in response. "But, Will, that doesn't mean much. I, um, have a lot of nightmares." He looked down at the floor uncomfortably. Will's expression softened and he ached for Mike, but his fear grew tenfold.

"But have you had nightmares more often, since the rain started?" Will pressed. Mike frowned and looked between them both. How had they known?

"E-every night." He admitted, slightly shakily. "But, guys, what-?"

"Mike. Think. Has anything else weird happened to you at all this week?" El interrupted and Mike stared helplessly back at her. He clenched his fingers tightly into a fist to stop them from shaking. Silence. Mike could feel the eyes of The Party boring into him. He took a deep breath, and nodded mutely.

"J-just a weird feeling." Mike said, hoarsely. "And.." he trailed off and glanced around at everyone. He coughed, once, awkwardly. He sounded crazy. Why were they all looking at him like that?

"Voices." He finished, finally. "I thought I heard voices. But I talked to that therapist we have, she said it was all to be expected." He twisted his fingers together anxiously and stared up at the adults, for confirmation that it was all just his silly imagination. But they were looking at Will and El. And Will and El looked utterly dismayed by Mike's admission.

"Guys?" Mike said, trying for casual and failing miserably. His voice

caught, noticeably.

Will made a movement as if to reach out and hold Mike, but then seemed to think better of it. Instead, he squared his shoulders, which gave the comical impression of a chihuahua squaring up for a fight, and met Mike's gaze head on.

"When we were in the Upside Down, we thought of you, Mike. And you helped me to fight Him. And spy on him. That made him angry. So now, he sees you as a danger." Mike just stared. The rest of the group looked worried, and the silence of the room felt heavy and stifling.

"Think about it. It's rained all week, storming, and Mike hates the rain."

"Mike fears losing us. And he's had nightmares about it all week." El added, softly. Mike made an odd, strangled sound and he met her eyes, his own eye a little wet. She took Will's hand, and pulled him forwards and down, to sit next to Mike on the couch. They held him tightly. Hoppers expression was full of grave understanding.

"You said, before, that this Mind Flayer monster thing. It wanted to kill?" Hopper prompted and Will visibly swallowed. His hand, curled around Mike's wrist, tightened involuntarily.

"Yes." Will whispered, his face terrified. "And it's found a new target. To get revenge on us." Mike closed his eyes in resignation and opened them again to see every single person staring at him intently.

"Me." He said, numbly. "It wants me."

7. Chapter 7

This isn't a chapter, apologies.

Basically, if anyone is still reading and is waiting on updates, I'm super sorry! I have a shit ton of stuff going on rn and exams.

Just wanted to let you all know that this is not abandoned and that I will be updating end of June ish, when my exams are over and I have a life once more.

Also, I have an actual plot sketched out and ideas now, so I'm going to edit and then finish this thing ASAP. But in June. So, see ya! & thanks for reading

Author's Note:

Hmu on tumblr @oedipus-tozier for more of the same!!!! Come chat about my boi Will w me!